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ABSTRACT

A study examined the development of the Listening Practices Feedback Report (LPFR). Subjects, 189 individuals from 17 companies, completed a questionnaire in which they listed the names of associates who were good or poor listeners and listed five criteria used to determine their selections. These criteria were used to generate items for the LPFR. Of the 1500 names of good or poor listeners generated by the questionnaire, 43 good listeners and 66 poor listeners were identified as such by 3 or more colleagues. LPFRs were sent to 6 associates of each listener and were returned by 2 or more associates for 30 good listeners and 37 poor listeners. Results indicated that only two practices did not distinguish good from poor listeners in the averaged perceptions of their associates: "Does this individual anticipate where the discussion is going?" and "Does this person ask the speaker to speak louder or clearer when the situation calls for it?" Items were then reworded to create two forms of the questionnaire which are used preceding the LPFR training program--one worded in terms of the respondent's listening habits and one worded in terms of an associate's listening habits. A distinct feedback form was developed for use in the training program. Findings suggest that the LPFR is a useful instrument for use in the assessment of the listening climate within organizations, as well as to provide feedback regarding the perceptions people have of the listening behaviors of individuals. (Four tables of data are included; 30 references are attached.) (RS)

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The Development of the Listening Practices Feedback Report

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The Development of the Listening Practices Feedback Report

In an analysis of twenty-five studies of the communication skills most needed by students for success in organizational settings, DiSalvo (1980) found listening to be the most commonly identified pragmatic skill. Listening skills are necessary for success for both subordinates and supervisors. Downs and Conrad (1982) conclude that listening ranks fifth among eleven important communication skills for managers as superiors, and first for managers as subordinates. Subordinates consider poor listening skill the second most contributing factor in unsuccessful communication interactions. Personnel managers consider listening the "most troublesome communication situation for all employees" when they are evaluating their communication training needs (Hanna, 1978).

Listening skills are a very important tool for effective management because they help to create a supportive climate for both employers and employees (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987). Lobdell, Sonada, and Arnold (1991) found that the way subordinates perceive their supervisor's listening behavior is significantly related to subordinates' perceptions of their supervisor's responsiveness, their perception of the general openness of the organization, and to the perceptions of the subordinates' own empowerment, or ability to influence the organization and to make decisions regarding their own work.

Both scholars and individuals working in business and industry consider listening one of the most important communication skills contributing to both the success of the individual in the organization and to the success of the organization in the world market (DiSalvo, Larsen, & Seiler, 1976; Golen, 1980; Hanna, 1978; Mundale, 1980; Smeltzer,1979: Smith, 1978; Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983).

Listening ability can be assessed in several ways. Direct measures of listening ability are available and can be administered to individuals to assess their listening ability. Many of these listening tests have been developed and used in assessment, research, and training (Watson & Barker, 1988). Listeners' behavior, such as body movements, can be examined for their effect on interaction (Harrigan, 1985). Individuals can also be asked to report their perceptions of their own listening skill (Husband, Cooper & Monsour, 1988; Norton and Pettegrew, 1979) and the listening skills of others (Emmert, 1986; Lobdell, Sonoda, & Arnold, 1991; Rhodes, 1987).

Many items in perceived listening skill instruments are generated using theoretical constructs from previous research and popular "how to" texts. Hunt & Cusella (1983) used this method to generate the items used to determine what specific aspects of listening behavior needed training within organizations. These items may then be reviewed by managers or other scholars for their face validity (Husband, Cooper and Monsour, 1988).

It is apparent that relying on researchers/scholars to generate items that are supposed to be representative of the potential universe of items could result in significant experimenter bias. Listening scholars are, generally, exposed to similar literature and research

about listening and, thus, share common perceptions of the process. This common perception may or may not represent the "real world" that is perceived by non - scholars.

This paper reports the development of the Listening Practices Feedback Report (LPFR) by Richard Brandt and Janice Brandt of Brandt Management Group, Inc, using a rationale parallel to that in earlier attitudinal research by Emmert and McDermott (1976), This resulted in the creation of an instrument (LPFR) that has as one of its unique features items generated by individuals similar to those with whom the instrument was designed to be used. The LPFR has been used in listening training in over 100 organizations with thousands of individuals.

METHOD

In 1981, 22 companies in a variety of businesses and industries throughout the United States were contacted and asked to participate in a study on listening. Questionnaires were distributed to 860 individuals in these companies. One hundred and eighty-nine respondents from 17 companies returned the surveys, for a 22% rate of return. An average of 11 respondents per company responded with a range from 1 to 80 respondents per company.

Each recipient was asked to "list the name of three associates or colleagues (boss, supervisor, peer, subordinate, etc.) whom you perceive to be a good listener." They then were asked to list at least "five criteria (qualities or habits) that you used to determine your selection for individuals mentioned" as effective listeners. Each recipient was also asked to list the names of three associates or colleagues whom they perceived to be a poor listener and to list at

least five qualities which made the recipient perceive them as poor listeners.

Each criterion listed by a recipient was recorded (see Table 1). The number of times a criterion was mentioned was also recorded. The researchers then grouped the items into categories of criteria (see Table 2) which were subsequently used to generate the items for the LPFR. The items generated for the LPFR reflect both the descriptive behaviors listed by the respondents as well as the frequency with which they were mentioned. This resulted in 28 items.

Each item was rated on a five interval scale labeled: almost all the time, to a large extent, to some extent, to a small extent, rarely if at all.

The questionnaires generated over 1500 names of people within the 17 organizations who were judged by their colleagues or associates as good or poor listeners. Two groups were then formed. If an individual were listed as a good listener by three or more colleagues, that individual was assigned to the "good listeners" group. If an individual were listed by three or more colleagues as a poor listener, that individual was assigned to the "poor listener" group. This produced a group of 43 "good listeners" and 66 "poor listeners."

Each individual in the two groups was sent 6 copies of the LPFR questionnaire, instructions, and addressed return envelopes. They were asked to write their names at the top of these 6 forms and distribute them and the return envelopes to colleagues with whom they frequently interacted at work. Usable responses of associates were received for 30 individuals in the "good listeners" group and for 37 in the "poor

listeners" group. An individual was considered usable if 2 or more associates returned the questionnaires for that individual.

RESULTS

The two groups were not significantly different in the number of responses used to generate the average scores for each respondent (good listeners=4.87/poor listeners=5.02, $t(65)=-.60$, $p=.55$).

The average of the associates' responses for each practice/item was considered the score for that practice for each of the 67 participants. An average was used for each practice because as few as 2 and as many as 6 associates responded for each participant. T-tests were used to compare the two groups, good and poor listeners, on each of the 28 practices/items. The results are reported in Table 3.

Each individual listening practice/item was correlated with the total LPFR to determine the relationship of that item to the total test score (see Table 4)

DISCUSSION

Only two practices do not distinguish good from poor listeners in the averaged perceptions of their associates: "does this individual anticipate where the discussion is going" and "does this person ask the speaker to speak louder or clearer when the situation calls for it?" These two items also have the lowest association with the total LPFR score. Both items were retained because they reflected listening practices which the researchers decided were important for their training program.

The Brandt Management Group, Inc. LPFR Feedback and Listening Training Program

Each practice/item was reworded to create the two forms of the questionnaire which are used preceding the LPFR training program. Form I, on blue paper, is worded so that the individual fills out the items for him/herself (To what extent do you take time, have patience, when listening to others?). Instructions then ask the recipient to put their own name on several alternately worded forms, Form II's on cream paper, to distribute them to colleagues or subordinates. These forms ask the individual to fill out the items for the designated person named at the top of the page (To what extent does this person take time, have patience, when listening to you?). These designated individuals remain anonymous. When the LPFR is used by the Brandt Management Group, Inc., perception feedback from designated others is not given unless a minimum of three individuals have responded to the target person so that the respondents remain completely anonymous.

A distinct feedback form was developed for use in the training program. For purposes of clarity this form will be referred to as the Listening Practices Feedback Report Training Instrument (LPFRTI). During the training program a LPFRTI is given to each participant. The items on the original LPFR were grouped into 3 categories based on the frequency of mention of these items in the original data used to develop the instrument. The most frequently mentioned items were classified as a Major Cluster (items 3,8,21, and 23 on the original LPFR). The Intermediate Cluster includes 16 practices (1,4,6,9,10,11,12,13,14,15, 16,19,20,24,25, and 27 on the original LPFR). The remaining 8 least frequently mentioned practices were

placed in a Minor Cluster (2,5,7,17,18,22,26 and 28 on the original LPFR).

The LPFRTI lists the items under each cluster. For each item the LPFRTI gives the recipient's raw score, the raw score average of the associates who filled out the LPFR on the recipient, and the percentile placement of the recipient based on the average of the associates' raw scores. The percentiles are based on data from 1,130 "typical" business people throughout the United States.

Participants are also provided with an average percentile placement for each of the major, intermediate and minor clusters for both their self ratings and their ratings by associates. An overall weighted percentile, the Listening Practices Quotient (LPQ), based on the associates' ratings in which the major cluster accounts for 60%, the intermediate cluster 30%, and the minor cluster 10%, is also given to the participants.

This is one of the unique features of the LPFR training program. The LPFRTI assesses each individual's own perception of their listening skill and offers that same individual some feedback (the LPQ) from colleagues to use in checking their self-perceptions against the perceptions of others. In addition it offers the participants some perspective relative to other participants in the LPFR national data pool.

The training program is designed to implement two major learning goals. First, the program is designed to show participants that regardless of how they think they listen in interactions, others' perceptions have a significant effect on their effectiveness on the job and are worth taking into consideration when evaluating their own

listening. Second, the program uses perceptions from others to call attention to listening problems that participants may not be aware of consciously so that listening improvement can occur. This information provided by the LPFR training program can be used as a personal resource for improving communication skills by the participants. A group score (for groups including over twelve individuals) for the specific group being trained can help both the group itself and others within the organization to evaluate the listening climate of the group and/or the organization.

Since the facilitator/consultant recognizes that the feedback given on the LPFRTI can have an important impact on the recipient, great care is taken to provide considerable information which helps the participant place his/her feedback in perspective. The research underlying the development of the LPFR is discussed, including how the criteria were chosen and evaluated. The facilitator discusses the limits of perceptual information and expected participant reactions.

Helping participants become aware of the limitations of the LPFR places their feedback from the instrument in an appropriate perspective. Five limitations discussed with participants are:

1) The LPFR does not measure how well a person listens or their ability to retain a thought. It does indicate how participants appear as listeners to others.

2) The LPFR is not an evaluation of the participant's job performance.

3) The LPFR is not a personality profile.

4) The LPFR is a snapshot in time and does not take into account changing business conditions and objectives.

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5) The LPFR has no absolute meaning other than the introspection and application which each participant brings to his or her own situation.

The facilitator's focus in providing the feedback is in helping the participant focus on retaining positively perceived listening practices and implementing a plan for developing and practicing those listening skills the participant would like to improve and have perceived more positively by others. The presentation of the LPFR results includes help and guidance by the facilitator, incorporating small group discussions for support and the sharing of ideas and suggestions about how to return to the workplace and thank colleagues for their time and input. Follow-up sessions help to maintain awareness of and practice in listening effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The LPFR is obviously a useful instrument for use in the assessment of the listening climate within organizations, as well as to provide feedback regarding the perceptions people have of the listening behaviors of individuals. This could be very useful information for individuals and organizations in which there is a desire to improve listening behavior.

Future research should provide additional information regarding the validity of the LPFR. For instance, the dimensional nature of the LPFR is strongly suggested by the clusters of items discussed earlier. A factor analysis of the responses to the LPFR should provide insight into the factors underlying the instrument. Likewise, future research

should address the relationship of scores on the LPFR to scores on other measures such as the Myers - Briggs Type Indicator and other personality tests and the Watson - Barker, the Brown - Carlson, or the Kentucky listening tests. It should be useful, indeed, in listening instruction to be able to compare self - perceptions and others' perceptions with each other as well as with actual scores on listening tests. Each of these comparisons should enable researchers to further define and delimit the process of listening.

TABLE 1

LISTENING PRACTICES FEEDBACK REPORT

PHASE ONE : Completed questionnaires identifying criteria (qualities or habits) for defining good and moderate to poor listeners uncovered the following information regarding perception in judging listening skill.

ATTENTIVE:
Concentrates on speaker
Does not answer phone
Full attention
Not distracted
Stop what they're doing
Show interest and concern
Intently Listening
Undivided attention
Sidetracks
Somewhere else
Negative reply
Changes subject
Must have things repeated
Reminded to do things
Mind on too many other things
Monopolizes conversation
Hears only part
Drifting mind

PARAPHRASES
Indicates understanding by repeating, amplifying or summarizing
Clarifies position
Analyzes
Sees both sides
Open minded
Perceptive feedback

DOESN'T INTERRUPT
Doesn't interrupt
Listens to suggestion fully
Let you completely finish
Stays on the topic
interupts with unrelated statements
Talks while others are speaking
Accepts interruptions
Walks away while you're speaking

SUPPORT AND TRUST
Trust and support
Always willing to listen or help
Backs up decisions
Morale booster
Honest
Frank and truthful
Sincerity
Concern
Makes you feel comfortable, worth listening to
Values opinion
Offers helpful suggestions
Helpful
Supportive responses
Confidences may be repeated
Lack of self-control and respect.
Disagreement over petty details

THINKS OF SELF
Stays on the subject
Thinking of self and own thoughts
Has own agenda
Denies speakers position
Hears what wants to hear
Thinks ahead to own remarks
Rather talk than listen
Preconceived conclusions
Rude, impatient
Gives impression of superiority
Gives advice - corrective "I told you so."
Talks about self
Out talk speaker

THINKS OF SELF (continued)
Defensive, argumentative
Lack of concern for others
Always right
Set mind
Lack self confidence
I sentences in response
Think ahead
Anxious to express personal views

FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:
Follows up
Results consistent with instructions
Get the job done
Instant action and response
Concerned for future reference
Remembers details
Relates information to others
Remembers conversation
Forgets 5 minutes later

OBJECTIVITY:
Objective
Separate personal from business
Evaluate and make timely (not snap) decision
Open mindedness
Even personality - stability
Takes job seriously
Honest and to the point
Fairness
Think before answering
Realistic criticisms
Clear thought patterns
Negative attitude
Mad - out to get you
Personal problem not listened to
Avoids involvement
Gets excited and doesn't listen

QUESTIONS:
Asks logical, relevant questions
Asks probing questions

MANNERISMS:
Good eye contact
Sit quietly
Stop what they're doing
Relaxed posture
Attentive facial expression
May be pretense
Nervous, jittery disinterested
Fiddles with things
Working on something else
Hurried
Time conscious
Looking around the room
Moving
Staring in space at walls, other people
Writing
Too busy
Bored, restless, shifting
Time conscious
Crosses arms as turn off
Frowns, head bent to side
Blank stare
Moody, uncommunicating
Makes phone calls
Nods, Yawns, Doodles

TYPES:
Courteous
Conscientious (job security)
Desire to succeed
Planner-organizer
Sense of humor
Generous, not irritated by requests
Friendly, pleasant
Informative
Punctual
Quiet
Organized
Moral booster
Leader
Irresponsible
Preach
Pass the buck
Condescending
Abrupt
Disorganized
Indecisive
Not corporate minded
Egotistical

TAKES NOTES:
Takes notes

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TABLE 2

LISTENING PRACTICES FEEDBACK REPORT

PHASE ONE (Continued): The criteria (qualities or habits) for defining good and moderate to poor listeners fell into categories of like practices.

The categories in descending order of mention:

Attentive (125)
Does or not interrupt (135)
Indicates understanding by repeating, clarifying, summarizing, amplifying (129)
Makes eye contact (101)
Support, trust, interest, sincere (85)
Asks relevant questions (76)
Follows up with appropriate action (71)
Hurried or opposites, patient and takes time (69)
Preoccupied (66)
Mannerisms (facial, fidgeting etc.) (44)
Retention (42)
Open minded (41)
Closed minded (32)
Misunderstands (30)
Defensive or argumentative (29)
Changes subject (27)
Takes notes (26)
Prepared or well informed (22)
Egotistical (18)
Asks to repeat (15)
Talks more than listens (14)
No response (14)
Objective (11)

TABLE 3

Means and T-test Results for LPFR Practices

LPFR Items	Good Listener Means	Poor Listener Means	T-Tests
-take time have patience, when listening	4.4	3.9	4.51***
-listen to someone without regard to official status or position	4.3	3.8	4.01***
-give the speaker full attention, as opposed to being preoccupied with other concerns	4.3	3.6	6.88***
-give appropriate non-verbal signals indicating attention	3.8	3.5	2.55*
-monopolize the discussion by talking more than listening	4.2	3.2	6.17***
-ask relevant questions for clarification on points that are technical or misunderstood	4.1	3.7	3.51**
-prepare or become informed when such knowledge or preparation is necessary	4.4	3.8	4.78***
-keep a confidence	4.6	4.2	4.15***
-take notes when notes are appropriate	4.1	3.6	3.61***
-change the topic before it has proper closure or agreement	4.4	3.7	4.66***
-accurately recall your comments or position at a later time	4.2	3.6	5.57***
-follow-up with prompt, correct action on points agreed to	4.2	3.8	3.06**
-encourage you to give your views on the subject or topic under discussion	4.2	3.7	3.49***
-listen with an open mind, free from personal bias, during discussions	4.1	3.3	5.86***
-become emotional or defensive when difficult situation is encountered	4.2	3.4	5.14***
-listen with sincerity as opposed to a false going-through-the-motions attitude	4.3	3.7	4.92***
-smile or otherwise acknowledge a clever remark	4.3	4.1	1.85#
-anticipate where the discussion is going	3.9	3.8	1.05
-accurately relate messages to a third party	4.2	3.9	3.37***
-maintain an appropriate degree of eye contact when speaking	4.4	4.2	1.78#

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Table 3. (cont.)

-interrupt when in a conversation or meeting	4.1	3.3	5.75***
-prohibit or hold to a minimum, outside distractions when in a discussion or meeting, e.g. phone calls or staff	3.8	3.4	2.93**
-respond or paraphrase your comments to ensure understanding	3.6	3.1	4.21***
-respond before thinking about the subject or topic under discussion	3.8	3.4	2.92**
-try to place himself/herself in your position, understand your concern and feelings	3.8	3.2	4.30***
-respond with emotion packed (trigger) words, phrases, or cliches which cause people to "tune-out" or "turn-off"	4.4	3.7	4.11***
-appear to be critical of the speaker's delivery, appearance, grammar, vocabulary, etc.	4.4	4.1	2.41*
-ask the speaker to speak louder or clearer when the situation calls for it	3.0	2.9	.88

\# p<.08
* p<.05
** p<.01
*** p<.001

TABLE 4

Correlation of Individual Practices With Total LPFR

LPFR Items	Correlations
-take time have patience, when listening	.80**
-listen to someone without regard to official status or position	.75**
-give the speaker full attention, as opposed to being preoccupied with other concerns	.78**
-give appropriate non-verbal signals indicating attention	.48**
-monopolize the discussion by talking more than listening	.68**
-ask relevant questions for clarification on points that are technical or misunderstood	.62**
-prepare or become informed when such knowledge or preparation is necessary	.66**
-keep a confidence	.65**
-take notes when notes are appropriate	.54**
-change the topic before it has proper closure or agreement	.68**
-accurately recall your comments or position at a later time	.70**
-follow-up with prompt, correct action on points agreed to	.57**
-encourage you to give your views on the subject or topic under discussion	.69**
-listen with an open mind, free from personal bias, during discussions	.82**
-become emotional or defensive when difficult situation is encountered	.65**
-listen with sincerity as opposed to a false going-through-the-motions attitude	.77**
-smile or otherwise acknowledge a clever remark	.55**
-anticipate where the discussion is going	.35*
-accurately relate messages to a third party	.58**
-maintain an appropriate degree of eye contact when speaking	.49**
-interrupt when in a conversation or meeting	.79**

Table 4 (cont.)

-prohibit or hold to a minimum, outside distractions when in a discussion or meeting, e.g. phone calls or staff	.55**
-respond or paraphrase your comments to ensure understanding	.51**
-respond before thinking about the subject or topic under discussion	.54**
-try to place himself/herself in your position, understand your concern and feelings	.75**
-respond with emotion packed (trigger) words, phrases, or cliches which cause people to "tune-out" or "turn-off"	.67**
-appear to be critical of the speaker's delivery, appearance, grammar, vocabulary, etc.	.40**
-ask the speaker to speak louder or clearer when the situation calls for it	.29*

* $p<.01$
** $p<.001$

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